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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evidence of Heavy-handed U.S. Diplomacy in Europe affects NATO's Intentions in Ukraine and NATO's Strategic Concept

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Abstract

A renewed Cold War with a new Central Front in Europe threatens international security. NATO's arc of crisis stretches from Ukraine in the northeast to Turkey and Syria in the south. The Warsaw Pact dissolved in 1991 but NATO's nuclear posture continues to threaten Russians who fear NATO expansion. Evidence of heavy-handed U.S. diplomacy in Europe has raised concerns about American intentions in Ukraine. The failed 2015 negotiations surrounding the United Nations Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty indicate it is time the Nuclear Weapon States in the 29-member NATO alliance move NATO's posture away from the Strategic Concept toward nuclear disarmament rather than deterrence.

Keywords: *Canada, cyberwarfare, Middle powers, Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Nuclear weapons, Russia, Strategic Concept, Ukraine, United States.*

Introduction

Facing Russian recalcitrance over Crimea and Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is strengthening its conventional and nuclear defences along the Polish and Baltic borders [1]. Recently the United States (US) announced it intends to modernize the B-61 bombers that carry NATO's tactical nuclear weapons. In turn Russia threatened it might deploy nuclear missiles to Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea if the US upgrades its nuclear weapons in Germany [2].

NATO's nuclear posture refers to: the United States (US) triad of air-, sea- and land-based nuclear weapons, referred to as the "ultimate authority"; the United Kingdom's (UK) submarine-based Trident ballistic missiles; France's *force de dissuasion* of air-, sea- and land-based nuclear weapons; as well as approximately 100 tactical thermonuclear bombs deployed by the US within five so-called Non-Nuclear Weapon States (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey) [3].

Evidence of heavy-handed U.S. diplomacy in Europe has raised concerns about American

intentions in Ukraine. Apparently around 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 13, 2015 about two dozen high-level U.S. diplomats, politicians and four-star generals held a discussion in a briefing room on the sixth floor of the luxury Bayerischer Hof hotel in Munich. Their frank comments behind a sound-proof door were leaked, perhaps to German intelligence but certainly to the German newspapers Bild and Der Spiegel, which published reports of the discussions [4].

Although not directly involved, the smaller NATO allies and the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) can learn from the revelations. In future, middle-powers within NATO like Canada, France and Germany will be asked to contribute to NATO's future operations in Ukraine. Like many Germans, Canadians tend to fear entrapment in a U.S.-led war, at the same time as they fear abandonment by NATO's reputed leader.

While German Chancellor Angela Merkel was earning public kudos for flying with French President Francois Hollande to Moscow to meet President Vladimir Putin in an effort to broker a ceasefire in Ukraine,

Obama's top diplomat for Europe, Victoria Nuland, dismissed their diplomacy in the closed-door meeting as "Merkel's Moscow thing" and "Merkel's Moscow junk" [5]. Note that the quote above and the ones that follow, along with descriptions of the tone of the meeting and emotions ascribed to some of those inside, are from widely used English translations of original translations to German for use by the two German newspapers.

The U.S. assistant secretary of state went on to criticize Germany, saying, "They're afraid of damage to their economy, counter-sanctions from Russia." A U.S. politician says, "It's painful to see that our NATO partners are getting cold feet." A U.S. senator calls German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen "defeatist" because she no longer believes in a Kiev victory. According to German reports, the phrase "German defeatist" was often heard in the room [6].

Another U.S. official spoke about the Europeans' "Moscow bullshit." U.S. Sen. John McCain was in the meeting and was quoted as angrily asserting, "History shows us that dictators always take more, whenever you let them. They can't be brought back from their brutal behaviour when you fly to Moscow to them, just like someone once flew to this city. Both newspapers reported Obama's close confidante Nuland seemed to have been the one who set the tone, saying, "We can fight against the Europeans, we can fight with rhetoric against them."

Several U.S. politicians appear hesitant about supplying weapons to Kiev. One asks whether it is only a tactic, a false promise to get the Europeans to put more pressure on Putin.

"No, it's not a tactic to push the Europeans," answers Nuland. "We're not going to send any four divisions into Ukraine, as the Europeans fear. It's only a relatively moderate delivery of anti-tank weapons."

"But what will we tell the Europeans if we really decide on delivering weapons?" asks one congressman. "What's our story then?"

NATO commander Gen. Philip Breedlove answers: "We're not on a footing to deliver so many weapons they could defeat Russia. That's not our goal. But we have to try to raise the battlefield cost for Putin, to slow down the whole problem, so sanctions and other measures can take hold."

Breedlove's shocking attitude to collateral damage-referred to by him as a "battlefield cost"-has been carefully translated into German and then back again into English.

Again top diplomat Nuland, who speaks fluent Russian and served as former U.S. vice-president Dick Cheney's security adviser, tells them: "I'd strongly urge you to use the phrase 'defensive systems' that we would deliver to oppose Putin's 'offensive systems.'" Typical of groupthink and a dangerous esprit de corps, there is no doubt in Breedlove's mind about what future U.S. arms deliveries to Ukraine should look like: "Russian artillery is by far what kills most Ukrainian soldiers, so a system is needed that can localize the source of fire and repress it. Ukrainian communications are disrupted or completely swamped, so they need uninterceptible communications gear. Then I won't talk about any anti-tank rockets, but we are seeing massive supply convoys from Russia into Ukraine. The Ukrainians need the capability to shut off this transport. And then I would add some small tactical drones."

Modernizing communications and deploying military drones are NATO's new mantras of modern warfare. Worries about a possible cyberwarfare attack by Russia against Ukraine have been exacerbated by the possibility that the U.S., Russia or Ukraine could strike first using cyber weapons and then the conflict could escalate to a possible nuclear exchange.

Earlier in February 2015, another leaked "f--k the EU" slur by Nuland in a telephone conversation was condemned by Merkel as "completely unacceptable" [7]. Also unacceptable are Russia and NATO's continued insistence on maintaining tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, weapons which they perceive as essential to their security.

NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept reasserted in 2014 that, "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance [8].

NATO celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2019 and there will be fireworks. At a high-level Inter-Action Council meeting in Toronto, Canada in January 2016, I asked Dr. Thomas Axworthy whether Canada's new Minister of Global Affairs, Stephane Dion, should revisit NATO headquarters in Brussels with a view to raising questions about NATO's reliance on deterrence, just like Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy did in 1999-2000 when the U.S. labelled him a 'nuclear nag [9]. The small meeting of high-level experts chaired by former Prime Minister Jean Chretien operates by Chatham house rules that require complete confidentiality but the idea of re-examining NATO's reliance on deterrence is often raised among NATO critics. The United States' allies need to ask themselves in the months leading up to NATO's seventieth anniversary in 2019 and the 2020 NPT Review Conference whether nuclear weapons actually protect them. Does the possession of nuclear weapons deter potential aggressors from attacking? Curiously, the leaders of the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) in NATO continue to profess their reliance on traditional nuclear deterrence, while the U.S. moved years ago toward a pre-emptive strategy that promises to strike first with nuclear weapons, even in the event of a limited chemical or biological attack [10]. The situation is similar to the late 1950s and 1960s when all the NATO allies continued to rely upon one permutation of nuclear deterrence-mutual assured destruction or MAD-even as the U.S. developed another permutation called 'flexible response' [11].

To clarify, NATO's 'new' Strategic Concept was asserted in 1991, reissued in 1999 and reconfirmed in 2000-2010. It links the NNWS in NATO to the overall nuclear policies of the NATO Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Over the last fifteen years, significant pressure to change NATO's nuclear posture emanated from coalitions of states and NGOs, including the Article VI

Forum, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the

Middle Powers Initiative (MPI), the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) [12]. Diplomats and high-level NGO representatives involved in the NPT Review Conferences, held every five years, often debated the implications of the NPT's 'Article VI' commitment for NATO's Strategic Concept [13]. Diplomatic debates also took place during NPT preparatory committee (PrepCom) meetings and NPT Review Conferences (RevCons). The founding chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative (MPI) and the Article VI Forum, Canadian Senator (ret'd) Douglas Roche argued that since states, including all NATO member states, endorsed the NPT, NATO could no longer claim its nuclear weapons were "essential" [14]. NATO headquarters was urged by many to rethink its policy but the Strategic Concept was reaffirmed stating that, "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance"[15].

Conversely, many bureaucrats, defence ministers, and parliamentarians believed that to ensure peace and prevent conventional war or coercion, the alliance had to maintain for the foreseeable future "an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities." [16] NATO's 2012 *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review* reasserted that nuclear weapons are the "supreme guarantee of the security of the alliance" [17] leading to more debates at the 2012-14 Prep Coms and 2015 Rev Con [18]. The 2015 RevCon ended in debacle and deadlock with no agreement on a final consensus document [19]. Faced with Russian recalcitrance over Crimea and Ukraine, NATO began to strengthen its conventional and nuclear defences along the Polish and Baltic borders [20] and modernize the B-61 bombers that carry tactical nuclear weapons [21]. Russia announced it might deploy nuclear missiles to Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea if the US upgraded its nuclear weapons in Germany [22].

Given Russian and American modernization and redeployments, an in-depth review of NATO's nuclear doctrine will be needed, perhaps in time for NATO's seventieth anniversary celebrations in 2019. Changes to the Strategic Concept might also be expected in the wake of changes to the U.S. Presidency. Notably previous efforts to change NATO's deterrent policy began at the national level among NATO's allies. The thrust for NATO's 1999 review essentially began because Canada's parliament released a report calling for a re-examination of NATO's reliance on nuclear deterrence and the Strategic Concept. Canada's Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy committed his department to attempt to change NATO's nuclear doctrine-for which he was often labelled a 'nuclear nag.' Working together

with the German Foreign Minister Joschka Fisher, these critics of NATO policy attempted to persuade NATO diplomats that the alliance needed to reconsider its reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes. In the final analysis, even American diplomats at NATO headquarters were impressed with the Canadian/German initiative and the determination of the Canadian Foreign Minister and his diplomatic aides [23]. In a similar fashion, working together with other like-minded 'middle powers' in NATO, such as Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, it might be possible to reassess NATO's nuclear doctrine so as to ensure a new Central Front in Europe does not divide Ukraine, isolate Kaliningrad from Russia, and further antagonize Russia.

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